

Immigration Assumptions in Population Projections

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Effects of Immigration

- U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform requested a study by the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) in 1995
- Study examined demographic, economic, and fiscal effects of immigration
- Edmonston was study director
- NAS published *The New Americans* report in 1997

Importance of Immigration for Population Projections

- Although fertility and mortality assumptions are important, immigration (and emigration) vary greatly and challenge policy analysis
- Projections require assumptions about numbers and characteristics of immigrants and emigrants

Role of Immigration

- Immigration is not the only demographic force at work
- Immigration will interact with current population structure that is already in place
- But, immigration will play a large role in determining the U.S. population size and composition over next decades

Immigration Assumptions

- Numbers of immigrants: one critical need is for visa status for new arrivals
- Projections require not only age and sex but data on labor force participation and other factors that are critical for projecting the number and characteristics of the population
- Emigration numbers and characteristics are elusive

Specific Demographic Effects of Immigration

- Population size: immigration will play a dominant role. Of 124 million additional Americans between 2000 and 2050, 80 million will be direct or indirect consequence of immigration
- Elderly population: no immigration policy can reverse the ageing of the U.S. population. The 65+ population will double by 2050 and immigration will have a small effect on its size.
- Ethnic/racial composition: one major effect of immigration is to increase racial/ethnic diversity of the population.

Immigration's Effects on the Elderly Population

- Short-term effect is more workers
- Small intermediate-term on number and proportion elderly
- Long-run effect is that immigrants also get older
- A steady flow of immigrants over time produces *an older, not younger*, U.S. population

Key Points

- Data needs continue to be a challenge for making appropriate assumptions for our population projections
- Immigration will add substantial numbers to U.S. population and change its racial/ethnic composition
- The elderly population will increase dramatically in coming decades but immigration will play only a supporting role